FBI Is Swamped With Requests for Data From Its Files

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The FBI continues to be swamped with requests for investigative records filed under the federal Freedom of Information Act of 1974, despite a massive effort to reduce the backlog, the General Accounting Office said yesterday.

In fiscal 1977, the GAO said, the FBI spent $6.4 million to review requests from persons seeking to find out if they are mentioned in FBI files.

At one point, the FBI assigned 300 special agents to Washington in an attempt to erase the backlog of requests, but more than 4,000 remain unsettled, the GAO said in a new report. In the last three years, the FBI received 48,000 requests for information, and the number seems certain to rise, the congressional auditing agency said.

Testifying before a House Government Operations subcommittee, GAO official Victor Lowe said the FBI has been unable to meet a requirement that it respond to each FOI request within 10 days. He recommended a 40-day answering period.